Book Reviews

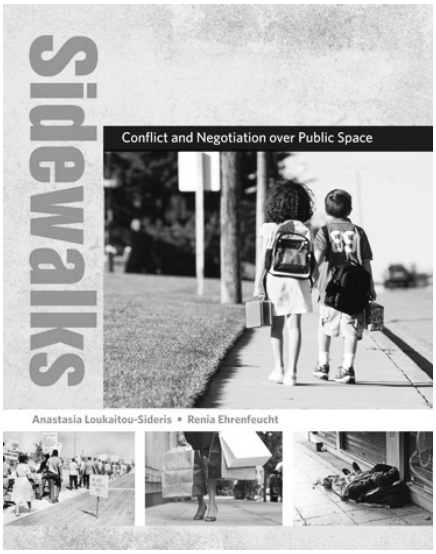
Sidewalks: Conflict and Negotiation over Public Space
Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris and Renia Ehrenfeucht
Reviewed by Krista Holub

Walking is regaining significance as a form of physical activity in this health-conscious nation, as a tenant of design in New Urbanist communities, and as a partial solution to environmental concerns caused by our society's dependence on the automobile. This renewed interest in pedestrian activity underscores the importance of sidewalks, which are often taken for granted in the urban context. In their timely book *Sidewalks: Conflict and Negotiation over Public Space*, Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris and Renia Ehrenfeucht examine the competing uses of and rights to urban sidewalks. The authors discuss how restrictive municipal regulations and ordinances have emptied sidewalks of the people that once made them vibrant public spaces. They encourage a more inclusive approach to regulating our public spaces in the future.

In similar fashion to other scholarly pieces that lament the privatization and increasing sterilization of semi-public spaces, this book introduces the reader to the complexity and "messiness" of sidewalks. The authors call upon the seminal works of Jane Jacobs and William Whyte to recount the importance of sidewalks in providing opportunities to encounter diversity and experience conflicting interests. The authors' analysis brings to light the fact that the process of negotiating competing functional, social, political, commercial, and environmental uses of sidewalks in recent years has been a "limiting process rather than an expansive one." In other words, regulations are based on exclusion of groups and uses, rather than on inclusion of all people.

The book details the long history of exclusionary planning (and of purposeful planning for target users) of street vending using both historic and contemporary examples. In the name of "public health," "aesthetics," or "social order," twentieth century reformers called for the prohibition of street vending in major downtown arteries. Such regulations slowed the streets' economic vitality, and the effects often fell disproportionately on low-income immigrant proprietors. Today's Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) often restrict street vendors from sidewalks to allow for an uncongested environment for permanent businesses. The actual day-to-day enforcement – or over-enforcement – of many of these restrictions is difficult to detail, but nevertheless can dramatically impact sidewalks use.

To illustrate common municipal responses and tools for addressing sidewalk issues, the authors use extensive



case study research from five cities in the United States: Boston, Los Angeles, New York, Miami, and Seattle. The book also details historic and contemporary accounts of resistance to restrictive sidewalk norms or regulations, such as African-Americans' refusal to cede the sidewalks as was the norm in the late nineteenth century. These types of actions continually challenge and redefine the "publicness" of such spaces. The examples reveal that while municipal sidewalk regulations are often intended to respond to concerns over issues such as homelessness, lack of economic opportunities, and perceived danger, such regulations often limit sidewalk usage without solving underlying problems.

To analyze the accounts of increased regulatory action, resistance and reaction, the authors offer a four-part framework: 1) the process of privatization, 2) individual rights (including the First Amendment right

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of free assembly), 3) quality-of-life claims, and 4) safety and security. Unfortunately, the framework falls short of fully capturing or clarifying the inherent conflicts of user interests that have been negotiated since sidewalks first emerged. The categories are broad enough that they are apparent without this framework, and they leave the reader uncertain of how or why these distinctions are necessary since many cases overlap several categories.

In their conclusion, Loukaitou-Sideris and Ehrenfeucht challenge city officials and "urbanites" to take an inclusionary approach to creating public spaces. They encourage all city dwellers to accept the complexity and messiness of sidewalks instead of regulating them into underutilized and useless concrete spaces. This is a tall order for city officials who, in the nation's heightened security environment, seek more control to create a safe and sterilized environment in which all scenarios are anticipated. While the authors' position of advocating equal access for all is admirable by many planners' estimations, it is also perhaps contradictory to their earlier admission that the use of and rights to urban sidewalks have always been fraught with competing interests.

Planners have much to gain from the five case studies that Loukaitou-Sideris and Ehrenfeucht detail in the book. Understanding the history of sidewalk regulation is a powerful tool that can help shape the future direction of such policies. Nevertheless, urban sidewalks will continue to be contested spaces. How we, as planners, respond to the conflict will ultimately determine the justice and vitality of our cities.

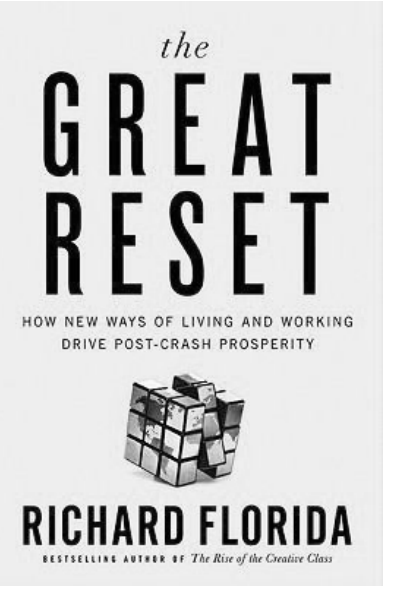
The Great Reset: How New Ways of Living and Working Drive Post-Crash Prosperity
Richard Florida
Reviewed by Kyle Vangel

Richard Florida's *The Great Reset: How New Ways of Living and Working Drive Post-Crash Prosperity* is a sweeping yet brisk work that attempts to make sense of how America will remake itself in the wake of the Great Recession. Florida draws heavily on the experience of the Long Depression of the 1870s and the Great Depression to make a convincing case that recovery from a severe economic downturn involves fundamental societal, economic, and geographic transformation. He contends that we are now at the outset of a "Great Reset" that will produce new social and economic forms. A key component of this process is a new "spatial fix" whereby the built environment is reconstituted to better match nascent modes of living and working. In the late nineteenth century, the rise of factories and the industrial city represented this nexus, while in the mid-twentieth century it was embodied by the marriage of mass production and auto-dependent suburbs. In the coming decades, Florida perceives that the emergence of the creative economy will be facilitated by fostering better linkages between, and densifying, the cities that comprise megaregions.

Florida also endeavors to predict the fates of specific cities and regions, but none of these vignettes quite match the narrative and conceptual power of his case studies of Pittsburgh and Austin in his most famous prior effort, *The Rise of the Creative Class*. Moreover, those familiar with his emphasis on "technology, talent, and tolerance" could probably surmise his prognostications for skilled cities like Washington, D.C. and Toronto on the one hand – and Las Vegas and Detroit on the other – without reading this book. Nonetheless, Florida is adept at tying these individual examples to the meta-narrative, particularly in the chapter "Sun sets on the Sunbelt," where he relates how that region's overbuilding manifests the overconsumption that characterized the U.S. economy prior to the Great Recession. Indeed, the "latter-day Gatsbyism" leading up to the crash is a favorite target of Florida throughout the book.

To conclude, Florida synthesizes how our economy and lifestyles are changing as well as the resulting implications for our future geography. This wide-ranging discussion covers topics such as shrinking the financial sector in favor of the "real economy" and upgrading job quality in the service sector. Undaunted by contentious issues, Florida is willing to take hard-line positions, for instance calling on government to focus less on propping up the industries of the past, which "might be better left to go the way of all things," and more on supporting the idea-driven industries of the future. In spatial terms, Florida envisions the rising prominence of transit-oriented development. Rebuffing the chorus of voices that anticipate the wholesale demise of suburbia, Florida instead believes suburbs will be retrofitted to offer a greater variety of housing and transportation options.

Florida musters a great deal of passion throughout the book, but arguments opposed to his vision are sometimes



too easily dismissed. He vehemently defends high-speed rail as "the one technology on the horizon that fits the geographic scale of megaregions," but fails to adequately discuss alternatives and paints cost-conscious critics as myopic. Florida also leaves himself open to continued criticism that his perspective is elitist, with, for instance, his emphasis on the locational choices of "global talent" and his use of a survey of graduating Harvard students as a key piece of evidence for shifting employment preferences.

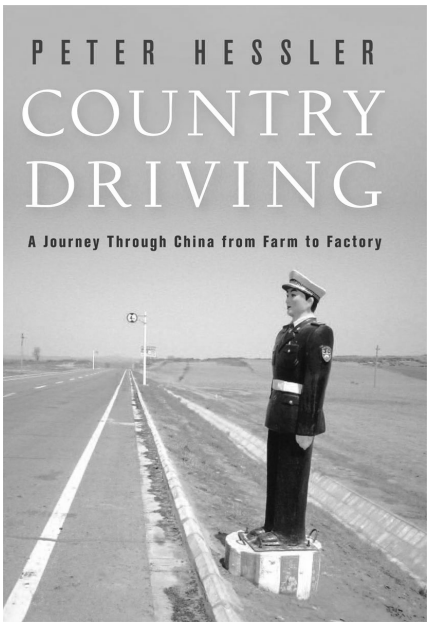
As in his previous efforts, Florida is at his best when distilling broad social, cultural, economic, and geographic trends in a manner that makes them easily accessible to a popular audience. While planners may be familiar with many of the examples he cites – the plight of Detroit, the revival of walkable neighborhoods – it is Florida's exceptional capacity for synthesis that renders this book an insightful read for professionals seeking a better grasp on the societal context in which they operate. Few writers capture the contemporary zeitgeist like Richard Florida.

Country Driving: A Journey Through China from Farm to Factory
Peter Hessler
Reviewed by Lauren Wang

In the past ten years, China has emerged at the forefront of the world economy. While news outlets focus on the placeless national statistics of China's astounding growth, *Country Driving: A Journey Through China from Farm to Factory* captures changing definitions of work, family, and success for rural and small town citizens.

Though its subtitle suggests a single journey, Country Driving is best read as a collection of long drives and extended stays drawn from author Peter Hessler's fifteen years in China as a reporter for the New Yorker and National Geographic. With a journalist's empathy and an adept understanding of Chinese culture, Hessler is well qualified to decode Chinese behavior and customs for the Western reader. Using a wildly inconsistent road atlas called "Sinomaps," Hessler drives past World Bank slogans painted on the Great Wall, befriends a peasant family near Beijing, and stalwartly trails two comical factory owners who use (or perhaps abuse) their business wiles. The author's eye for quiet irony makes him an enjoyable travel companion.

In addition to the human element, Hessler captures the effects of an emerging automobile culture. By American standards, Hessler's twenty years of driving experience is commonplace, but in the Chinese countryside, his facility with the personal automobile is exceptional and even legendary. Friendly townspeople often try to buy him a drink, using arguments like, "Most people here have only been driving for a year or two. With so much experience, of course you can drink something!" Indeed, even though most Chinese people start driving in their 30s because



of the stringent driving tests and financial barriers, this subset nonetheless generated an 80 percent increase in passenger car sales in 2003 alone.

In another series of travels, Hessler drives along a highway expansion project through towns transformed by new industries. In place of less profitable industries like fishing and agriculture, entrepreneurs now capitalize on producing massive quantities of a single specialty product. "Button City," a town of 64,000 residents, produces 70% of the buttons for clothes made in China. Other towns, for example, manufacture one quarter of the world's drinking straws, one-third of all socks, or 40% of all neckties.

While China's cities are undeniably bursting with opportunity, Hessler witnesses the darker side of the central government's involvement in rural economic development. The author meets a man whose village digs vacant holes, ostensibly to support a World Bank project that is showcased to outsiders as a tree-planting campaign. Local officials embezzle the seedling funds for their personal use, while workers accept an abysmal daily wage of five packages of five-cent ramen noodles. The underlying motivation is that their participation buys them continued, critical state funding to cope with regional drought issues.

Hessler's book connects readers to the unnoticed villages of a country whose urban accomplishments continue to surprise itself and the world. China's transportation experience thus far has been vastly different from the U.S., where railroads and automobiles enabled the settlement of new frontiers. Rather than inviting people into the countryside, roads in China have instead brought them into urban areas. Country Driving is a compilation of chance encounters and observations about this new Chinese way of life. This book provides a colorful and varied glimpse for any planner curious about the on-the-ground effects of China's relentless economic and social evolution.